SELECT BOARD TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 2021

The regular meeting for the Monson Select Board convened at 7:00 p.m. in the conference room in the Town Office Building at 110 Main Street. In attendance were Dr. Richard M. Smith, Patricia A. Oney, Mary K. Hull, Town Administrator Jennifer L. Wolowicz, and the media.

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Public Comment:

- Dimitri Krutov, Cedar Swamp Road, approached the Select Board and said he hand delivered the letter he just gave to the Select Board, to the Zoning Enforcement Officer on August 18, 2021. Mr. Krutov noted the Zoning Enforcement Officer had two weeks by law to reply and he has yet to reply to his concerns. He is requesting the Select Board contact that office to ask that Mr. Krutov's request get a response. Mr. Krutov said this issue has been ongoing for a while. It's a difficult issue to deal with and feels it's the job of the Zoning Enforcement Office to do.
- Robert Kaddy, Butler Road, approached the Select Board regarding the Fire Station being planned, and felt when he heard it was going to cost \$25 million, doesn't want to see his taxes go up. He feels the average tax bill will go up about \$500 a year if it is \$25 million. If it's half of that, it's going to be \$250 a year, which is still too much. He feels it would be great to see a new fire station but also doesn't want to see a Proposition 2 ½ Override, and feels it has to be done right and at the right price. Mr. Kaddy said he feels the best way to go is to have our grant writer, our Town Coordinator, find a grant for 70% to 75% of the cost.
- Beau Schneider of the Board of Health approached the Select Board regarding the proposed Shared Public Health Services Agreement and said he can see a possible miscommunication coming up between the Select Board and the Board of Health. Mr. Schneider said this proposal was considered at the Board of Health meeting held on July 14, 2021 and they haven't met since that time due to conflicts in scheduling, etc. At that meeting he said he was asked to sign a letter which was a Municipalities Statement of Agreement relative to the proposed Shared Services Agreement that documents the Monson Board of Health's commitment to pursue good faith negotiations for the proposed Shared Services Agreement. Mr. Schneider noted the Board of Health has not officially signed off on that yet.

Dr. Smith said he thought this was discussed and voted on.

Mr. Schneider replied, not that he is aware of.

- Jim Pennington, Paradise Lake Road, and also a member of the Finance Committee, approached the Select Board and said he is not opposed to a new fire house, but has a problem with the area they are proposing to build it on because when he joined the Finance Committee about thirty years ago, they took up a proposal from the Town Administrator at that time Ms. Neggers, about the old South Main Street School and about it being a brownfield, contaminated with lead, nickel, arsenic, and all kinds of things, and at that time, money was appropriated to start that cleanup. It was never finished. Mr. Pennington's proposal is any monies that are given for this project should be for finding out what is in that soil first, as that \$30,000 allotted could easily turn into \$300,000 or more.
- Shirley Lamb, Cedar Swamp Road, approached the Select Board regarding questions not being answered by the Board of Health, Zoning Enforcement Officer, etc. that have been addressed and not followed through. They were told the town will not act on them and therefore is asking for a spot on the agenda regarding these issues and to protect her property.
- Roxanne Gunther, May Hill Road, approached the Select Board requesting the Select Board charge the Bylaw Committee to possibly make two new bylaws. One regarding fencing and the other regarding light pollution.
- Karen Nothe-Valley, Stafford Road, approached the Select Board regarding tonight's agenda item number seven on COVID 19 policies and mask mandates. Ms. Nothe-Valley said we are at the eighteen-month mark and there is no end in sight and with everyone wanting the same thing, a return to normal activities. She feels getting our vaccination rates up is the key to the path forward. Ms. Nothe-Valley said she feels the mask mandate in the schools will be in place for a while and everyone needs to do whatever they can to get the virus transmission lower in Monson. The town's vaccination rate sits at a dismal 57% well below the state average. Ms. Nothe-Valley noted the School Committee announced they are preparing an eighteen-month summary of all their pandemic related actions, and she is requesting the same from the Board of Health, in order to identify all the gaps and to see what we can do better.

OLD BUSINESS:

Public Health Excellence Grant Program for Shared Services – Eric Weiss, PVPC:

Mr. Weiss approached the Select Board and noted there haven't been a lot of changes since the last time he met with the Select Board. This has now been through the hands of four lawyers with two of the other towns having already signed this agreement: Hampden and Wilbraham.

Mr. Weiss summarized this is an agreement for ten years but can be revisited at any time, the shared health arrangement would run through the Town of Longmeadow, and any employee through the shared arrangement would be an employee of the Town of Longmeadow. Mr. Weiss noted all the arrangements are laid out very clearly including costs and shared roles.

Dr. Smith said he is happy to see the way it is now calculated and appreciates Mr. Weiss putting it in.

Mr. Weiss continued summarizing adding the Health Director will work with emergency service, police, fire, etc. The annual budget will be prepared in a timely manner coinciding with municipal town budgets so there are no questions and noted there is a three-year grant in the amount of \$322,000 from the Department of Public Health received this year supporting this; \$287,500 will be received in the following two years. This will cover the three new shared positions. In Section 8.6, there is a breakdown on the share of the budget by percentage in terms of what each town will pay. In the appendices it's spelled out further by dollars if the dollars stay the way they are. It is a four-town arrangement with Monson, Hampden, Wilbraham, and Longmeadow as the towns that would sign onto this at this time, with the possibility other towns could be interested depending on the success of it.

Mr. Weiss said the Town of Longmeadow has been completely transparent in terms of all the efforts, costs, and things they have put together. The next task to be undertaken by this regional group is the writing of the actual bylaws for the governance of the group, and that towns will have one member on each piece. Mr. Weiss said he will propose a rough draft that will go under review by everybody to guarantee there is a structure in place to monitor going forward, beyond what has already been described.

Ms. Hull asked what the deadline is that we were on to sign this by.

Mr. Weiss responded it's up to the town.

Ms. Wolowicz noted Lori McCool is currently on a part-time basis for us as a consultant, and noted Ms. McCool is looking for an end date to that.

Dr. Smith said he was surprised to hear from the Board of Health that this hasn't been voted on.

Mr. Weiss said the two times he was scheduled to meet with the Board of Health he couldn't do it as things came up with scheduling and timing.

Dr. Smith noted the agreement states the Board of Health of each municipality has recommended approval of this agreement and asked Mr. Schneider where the Board of Health stands on this as he was under the impression they were working on that.

Mr. Schneider approached the Select Board and said the Board of Health is working on it and it has been discussed at their meetings off and on all summer and just never came to a vote. With the discussions the Board of Health has had he doesn't see any great resistance on the part of the Board of Health.

Ms. Oney wondered if the Select Board could vote to approve this agreement subject to the Board of Health giving their recommendation and have the Select Board approve it, to save some time.

Dr. Smith said he agrees, so it doesn't have to be discussed each time.

Ms. Wolowicz said this is a very positive move for the town.

It was agreed Mr. Weiss would attend the Board of Health meeting, even if it was through zoom.

Ms. Oney made a motion to approve the agreement subject to the Board of Health's recommendation. Ms. Hull seconded. A roll call vote was taken as follows: Ms. Oney – aye; Dr. Smith – aye; and Ms. Hull – nay.

Shared Animal Control Agreement, Chrissy Florence, Heath Inspector/Supervisor, Town Planner:

Palmer Town Manager Ryan McNutt approached the Select Board and introduced Animal Control Officer Sidney, and Cassy who is the Assistant Animal Control Officer.

Mr. McNutt said they made the recommended changes and noted the Town of Warren has been removed as they have chosen to do something on their own. This agreement is for the Towns of Monson, Ware, and Palmer.

Ms. Oney made a motion to approve the Inter-Municipal Agreement for the Palmer Interim Regional Dog Pound. Ms. Hull seconded, and it was unanimously VOTED.

Gifts to the Town Request – Lee Williams, Monson Road Race:

Ms. Williams approached the Select Board and said this is their 25th year. Ms. Williams said they would also like to request the use of the gazebo this year and explained due to COVID they are going to try to do as much as they can of this event outside. Ms. Williams noted they already have Memorial Hall reserved and they will be following the CDC guidelines. Their other request is for the big electronic sign they usually put out facing Route 32 south that says caution, go slow, runners in the road.

Dr. Smith told Ms. Williams to speak to Ben about the electronic sign and cones, and to also speak with the Police Chief.

Ms. Williams said she has spoken to Police Chief Kozloski.

Ms. Williams explained the race is held in honor of Kelly Waldron and Kathy Waldron Perry, sisters who died eight months apart from different types of cancer and will be held on Sunday November 7, 2021. These are certified half marathon and 5K races and past proceeds have gone to the American Cancer Association of Western Mass., American Lung Association, Quaboag Valley Hospice, and the Make-A-Wish Foundation. This year the proceeds will be going to Griffin's Friends which is a non-profit group that provides support to children who are stricken with cancer, and their families. The applications can be found at www.monsonmemorial classic.com. Ms. Williams noted the half marathon is probably the hardest in New England.

Ms. Williams said they are looking for the usual donation from the Gifts to the Town in the amount of \$1,500.00 to help mitigate the costs involved.

Ms. Oney made a motion to approve the \$1,500 from the Gifts to the Town account. Ms. Hull seconded, and it was unanimously VOTED

Ms. Oney made a motion to allow the use of the gazebo. Ms. Hull seconded, and it was unanimously VOTED.

Fire Station Building Committee Update – Gary Horne, Building Committee Chair: Rebecca Hopkins, project Architect Manager of Emerging Technology and Principal Jeff McElravy approached the Select Board.

Ms. Hopkins gave a presentation explaining the two options of either adding on to the existing fire station or building a newly constructed facility where the former South Main Street School/Dan Wesson Arms building stood on the corner of Main Street and Bliss Street.

Ms. Hopkins explained the cost of renovating the existing fire station and brining everything up to code will cost \$15.9 million while the cost of a completely new facility is \$16.1 million.

Following the presentation, a discussion ensued with members of the Finance Committee, Maureen Sullivan, Jim Pennington, and Kenneth Parkes, along with several residents who agreed with the suggestions of testing the soil at that site and seeking grants to help pay for the project. Ms. Sullivan suggested making sure one of the two abutting property owners wants to sell their property prior to moving ahead.

Mr. McElravy said the purpose of doing this study is to identify the next steps in moving this project forward.

Dr. Smith said this all goes back to looking at spending \$16 million first, before looking at properties, purchasing property, and soil testing because without that, who cares about the rest.

Dr. Smith reiterated tonight was just an update with no discussion.

Fire Chief Brian Harris said he would like to put an article on the Special Town Meeting warrant for \$60,000 for the soil testing.

Ms. Wolowicz said she doesn't feel this project is ready to move forward to a Special Town Meeting as there are still too many unanswered questions and a lot of confusion, just in this room alone, and she would feel very uncomfortable moving this forward.

After further discussion, Dr. Smith told Chief Harris he can submit the article and we will take it from there.

Church Seat Dam Update:

Ms. Wolowicz explained at the last meeting a resident came in and made a public comment regarding the removal of the dam and asked if the town could take over ownership of the dam from the resident. Ms. Wolowicz explained this is in the hands of the Conservation Commission right now.

NEW BUSINESS:

Acceptance of Meeting Minutes:

Ms. Hull made a motion to approve the meeting minutes for September 14, 2021 – open session. Ms. Oney seconded. A roll call vote was taken as follows: Ms. Hull – aye, Ms. Oney – any, and Dr. Smith – abstained.

Assessor's Office Staffing Update – Director Goodrich & Farnum:

Human Resource Director Madeline Goodrich and Finance Director Jamie Farnum approached the Select Board.

Ms. Wolowicz explained our Principal Assessor left within the last month to pursue other avenues. In the meantime, we have an administrative assistant that works in the office. Ms. Wolowicz explained Ms. Farnum is the CFO who oversees the accounting office as well as the assessor's and treasurer's offices. Ms. Goodrich is our treasurer as well as the director of human resources.

Ms. Wolowicz explained over the last month they have had talks with the Board of Assessors, and an outside consultant. We currently have a consultant from Mayflower, Roy Bishop, who does work for us on a continual basis, and is a fixture in many town halls.

Ms. Farnum explained right now, between where Maryann Wilkinson left us and with Mr. Bishop's help, we are in a good spot in terms of planning any forms that need to be completed in the Gateway software program to reach the tax rate setting in November beginning of December. As far as the function of Principal Assessor and the information that needs to be inputted, we have the appropriate resources to do that right now. Ms. Farnum said we also have resources for the assessor's clerk who is fairly new. Ms. Farnum said she has reached out to other communities to see where our salary is in terms of other like communities and found it comparable.

Ms. Goodrich said it looks like through FY22, all the taxes for the Principal Assessor are being fulfilled, and explained looking at other surrounding communities, it seems like things are changing a little bit on how they are staffing offices. Some communities have two assistant assessors or an assistant assessor and a clerk in the office and use a consulting firm to do the remainder of the work.

Ms. Goodrich said after completing all the research, her recommendation right now would be to hold off on posting for a principal assessor and look into posting for an assistant assessor. Ms. Goodrich said we need someone with a good background in assessing who can take on the phone calls, the window/counter, and daily tasks who can also train the current clerk. Ms. Goodrich said if at the end of FY22 we find we do need a principal assessor in the building, we could also post the position at that time.

Dr. Smith said we would then have three people in that office and he doesn't feel we need that many in that office.

Ms. Goodrich said that isn't uncommon and feels the idea would be to grow the position having someone coming in as the assistant moving up to the principal and noted schooling is very available, whereas the Treasurer's position takes about seven years to get certified because you only get to go one week a year to class, so it's slower.

Ms. Farnum noted the consultant we have is providing the assistance in going out in the field doing all the inspections and inputting all the information into the Gateway software program and backing up the research and information they are gathering.

Dr. Smith noted the only glitch he sees is if the assistant assessor doesn't want the principal assessor's position, which would create a third position in that office.

Ms. Wolowicz stated they are learning not every community has a principal assessor, they have an associate assessor, and the Board somethings does some of the work, or they have a consultant; there are different models out there. Ms. Wolowicz noted they are making sure all

the work is getting done and that it is being done properly, so there is no lag or anything with setting the tax rate and having the bills go out, etc.

Dr. Smith asked what the cost savings is with the clerk, the assistant, and the outside consultant? And wondered if this is still a savings over the assistant and a principal or a principal and a clerk.

Ms. Farnum said yes, there would be a savings because with having the assistant vs. the principal, the savings is there. In addition to the budget, the principal's salary is paying for the consultant, so there won't be an increase in the consultant line. We can do add on services as there is still flexibility in the budget by not having the principal assessor's salary.

Russell Bressette approached the Select Board and said he has been on the Assessor's Board for forty-nine years, and noted Monson has the largest number of roads of all 351 cities and towns in the State of Massachusetts and feels an assistant could do a lot of the work, where a consultant goes out on any new construction. However, if something was started a year ago and we don't go back to check on that, that's what the principal assessor would do. They would go out on all the other properties that were started that the consultant doesn't do. Mr. Bressette feels there would be a lot we are missing without a principal assessor and added this is the base for our growth, and he wanted this to be considered as part of the decision.

Dr. Smith asked Mr. Bressette if he is recommending maintaining a principal assessor.

Mr. Bressette clarified even if we had an assistant assessor who could leave the office and go out in the field to pick up all the things that are being done that the consultant isn't doing that would work and noted a consultant will check on new construction and permits only.

Ms. Oney asked if the assistant would do that.

Mr. Bressette said not necessarily, because the assistant doesn't have the knowledge to measure the house and do the interior inspection.

Ms. Oney said the Board of Assessor's do inspections too.

Mr. Bressette said he hasn't done any inspections since 1978 when he walked the entire town.

Ms. Wolowicz said the consultant will do whatever we ask them to do and the assistant, or associate, or principal, can also do that as well if they are trained to.

Ms. Goodrich said historically our assistant inspector did a lot of the inspections, so our goal would be to find somebody that's experienced in municipal assessing and has that background.

Christopher Haley approached the Select Board and said he has been on the Board of Assessors for three months. He said he has some concerns because he feels we are in a historical labor market and feels it might be difficult to find somebody that quickly. His other concern is since he was elected there is nobody in that office that was there when he was elected just three months ago and feels there is no institutional knowledge left, so whoever is hired as an assistant is also going to have to teach the clerk, which he feels might be difficult in this labor market. Mr. Haley said he feels we are going to get to the end of FY22 and not be able to find someone.

Ms. Wolowicz noted they have had conversations with the Department of Revenue who noted there were thirty vacancies at that time for assessors across the state and noted the Town of Palmer just recently hired someone so the other people who applied are local and still looking for a job. Ms. Wolowicz also explained some people have already submitted qualified resumes for the position, and she feels we will have a qualified pool to look at.

Ron Avery from the Board of Assessors approached the Select Board and noted he has been on the Board since 2016. Mr. Avery said basically they are looking at hiring an assistant assessor and giving that person principal assessor responsibilities and workload.

Ms. Farnum said the whole reason they want to hire an assistant assessor is to make sure they are prepared to take on the role of principal assessor. Ms. Farnum said they have support for the assessor's clerk who is currently in the office, to make sure she has the appropriate resources.

Dr. Smith said he is comfortable with their recommendation.

The Board thanked Ms. Farnum and Ms. Goodrich and the Board of Assessors for coming in.

Fire Department Gifts to the Town Request – Chief Harris:

Ms. Wolowicz explained Chief Harris is requesting \$300 from the Fire Department Gifts to the Town to spend on food and paper goods for the Monson Fire Department Open House.

Ms. Oney made a motion to approve the request as presented. Ms. Hull seconded, and it was unanimously VOTED.

Patio Party, October 23, 2021 – Monson Free Library – Director Bodwell:

Hope Bodwell, Director of the Monson Free Library approached the Select Board and explained the library will be holding their 3rd patio party on Saturday, October 23, 2021, from 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. The Beer Guy will be there, along with the Flame-N-Go food truck. The band Whiskey Rebels will be performing their rockabilly music from 2:00 to 4:30 p.m. They will also have three vendors who will be selling vinal records. Raffles will be held to support the library.

Ms. Bodwell also announced the youth services librarian, Sandy Courtney, is leaving for another opportunity that has opened up for her. An open house farewell party will be held for her on the patio on Thursday, October 7, 2021, from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. with light refreshments. Everyone is welcome to stop by to say thank you to her for all she has done for our community. Ms. Bodwell announced they won't be doing too many children's activities in the month of October due to her leaving this position.

Bellmen Antique Fire Museum 50th Anniversary Proclamation:

Ms. Hull read the proclamation into the record, as attached.

Dr. Smith reiterated they will be having an open house this Saturday, October 2, 2021, starting at 11:00 a.m. for anyone wishing to attend.

COVID 19 Policies & Mask Mandate:

Dr. Smith reiterated this Board was asked awhile back to write a letter to the School Committee regarding the wearing of masks, and Ms. Hull brought up some concerns as far as health.

Dr. Smith noted he has had two meetings with the School Superintendent. The last meeting also included the Chair of the School Committee. They assured Dr. Smith all the information is there on their homepage at the top where it has the COVID 19 banner, and anyone who has any questions on that can get their answers there.

Dr. Smith said some people have been asking about the town, and he noted this hasn't been discussed as far as what the Board would like to do. He can say personally he is not in favor of a mask mandate like other towns are currently doing, unless there was a huge outbreak in town. Dr. Smith said we do have a health agent in town who has been monitoring the number of cases in Monson, which is currently relatively low.

Ms. Oney said she agrees with Dr. Smith. Right now, Ms. Wolowicz is keeping the Board updated on the numbers, and as long as we stay low enough, she is fine with that, but as soon as the numbers start jumping up, she is good with putting one in place.

Ms. Hull said she would like to see us reach out to the Department of Health to maybe have them come in to have a conversation and answer questions. Ms. Hull feels the residents don't have faith in the Board of Health at this point, though it isn't any fault of the Board as no one has been through this before.

Dr. Smith felt this request would have to come from the School Committee.

Ms. Hull clarified she is talking as a whole community.

Ms. Wolowicz said she can reach out to the Department of Public Health to see if they have a representative who could come to one of the meetings.

The Select Board agreed that would be excellent.

Ms. Wolowicz explained even though the Select Board is not talking and voting to do a mask mandate, that doesn't mean people can't chose to wear a mask. Also, town employees can meet people outside, or residents could use the drop box at the front door, or mail things in, if they feel uncomfortable about coming inside.

Dr. Smith said he personally isn't in favor of a vaccine mandate for all town employees, as a lot of communities are talking about that too.

Ms. Oney said she feels it's important for people to get vaccinated and to encourage it as she feels this is the way to get through this from everything she has read, but won't say we need to mandate it.

Ms. Hull said she feels this is one of the things people would like questions answered about.

Karen Nothe-Valley approached the Select Board and commented she agrees with everything the Board is saying and feels they are taking a very rational approach, but also pointed out other towns have a higher vaccination rate, such as Longmeadow with 75% and they seem to have a more coordinated effort on this issue. Ms. Nothe-Valley said she would like to see all the Boards come together and really promote it and doesn't understand why we haven't had any kind of vaccine clinic at any of the recent events that were held such as National Night Out and the Food Truck Festival and feels we could be doing more.

Ms. Hull noted none of the members on the Board of Health are doctors and she feels uncomfortable telling anyone she recommends they get a vaccine and added she would encourage a sign that says talk to your doctor about the vaccine.

Nikita Sullivan, a member of the Board of Health, approached the Select Board and said she applauds the hesitation for any sort of mandates. She wouldn't be for a mask ban or a mask mandate and believes we need to be educated and to follow the science and the truth to guide us into making the right decisions.

Close STM Warrant:

Ms. Oney made a motion to close the Special Town Meeting warrant. Ms. Hull seconded, and it was unanimously VOTED.

Correspondence was read and completed.

In Other Business to Come Before the Board:

 Ms. Hull wondered about the zoom hybrid meetings and guidelines on the Gifts to the Town Account.

Ms. Wolowicz noted HR is looking at different policies for us to put together and will have both on the next agenda with the goals.

Ms. Oney asked if we have an update to the Vietnam memorial.

Ms. Wolowicz explained Gretchen Neggers, who watches our meetings, brought some history to the conversation, and noted there is a family history there and the family had requested the gentleman be put on the Wales monument, and we are respecting that.

Ms. Oney wondered if the Board had any appetite for putting something in writing to
the state and probably the trial court, to address the situation of the mold in the
Springfield Courthouse since we do have people in town who work, visit, and have jury
duty in that courthouse. Ms. Oney said everything you are hearing about it is just as bad
if not worse.

Ms. Hull wondered if we are going to do that wouldn't we do the same thing for Holistic since they also have a mold issue and some of our residents work there.

Ms. Oney felt that was a different issue as that is being investigated and she is asking more for a public recognition and support of the people who are fighting for their own health at this point.

The Board agreed they are in support of this.

Ms. Oney said she would draft something up for the next meeting.

Dr. Smith asked for the draft prior to the next meeting to allow time to look it over.

- Ms. Wolowicz said this Thursday night in this room is the Open Space Public Visioning Session from 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. The public is encouraged to attend.
- Ms. Wolowicz noted Craig Jalbert, Monson's Water/Sewer Superintendent, has been selected as a recipient from the Mass. Water Works Association to receive the Executive Director Award for an active or affiliate member whose knowledge, accomplishments, and contributions in the waterworks industry and his outstanding service to the Association entitles that individual to special recognition. Ms. Wolowicz added Mr. Jalbert is a wonderful person and he does so much for the town.

- Ms. Wolowicz reiterated the town submitted a Commonwealth Community Compact Grant about a month ago and noted we recently received our award letter with a dollar amount of \$50,000 for the work we are going to do to develop a bridge and culvert inventory, as well as \$15,000 to help us with the cost associated with developing a housing production plan for Monson, which Ms. Wolowicz said is so needed in this community as it's an aging community and a lot of people are looking for places to live.
- Dr. Smith noted the Food Truck Festival was held this past Saturday and was a great success.
- Ms. Wolowicz noted the Lights of Hope was held the prior weekend on September 19th starting at 3:00 p.m. They had a lot of people there for all the activities including the bounce house, the dunk tank, among others. This dovetailed into the candlelight vigil at 6:00 p.m. with speakers.
- Roxanne Gunther asked about the bathrooms in Veterans Field and when they will be working.

Ms. Wolowicz responded they will hopefully be working this week.

At 9:45 p.m., Ms. Oney made a motion to adjourn from open session. Ms. Hull seconded, and it was unanimously VOTED.

Mary K. Hull, Clerk	